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Evangelical Ministers Recorded

Mr. *Backus*'s

SERMON

At the Ordination of

Mr. ASA HUNT.

Mr. Burlin's

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At the Ordination of

Mr. ASA HUNT.

Evangelical Miniſters deſcribed, and diſtinguiſhed from Legaliſts.

A

SERMON,

The Subſtance of which was delivered

October 30. 1771.

AT THE

ORDINATION of

Mr. ASA HUNT,

To the PASTORAL CHARGE of the Third BAPTIST-CHURCH in *Middleborough*.

[Publiſhed at their REQUEST.]

By ISAAC BACKUS,

PASTOR of the Firſt CHURCH of that Denomination in ſaid TOWN.

Bleſſed is the People that know the joyful Sound.
Pſa. lxxxix. 15.

BOSTON: Printed for, and Sold by PHILIP FREEMAN, in Union-Street. 1772.

AN
Ordination SERMON.

2 CORINTHIANS III. 6.

Who alſo hath made us able Miniſters of the New-Teſtament; not of the Letter, but of the Spirit; for the Letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth Life.

THE office of a miniſter of Chriſt, as it is a moſt weighty, ſo it is as trying a lot as any that mortals were ever employed in. They are made a ſpectacle unto the world, to angels and to men: All eyes are upon them, and if they are faithful they will be hated and envied by many. Thus it has been in all ages. The great apoſtle of the Gentiles, though one of the moſt faithful and exemplary men that ever lived, was traduced in the famous church of Corinth, as a whiffling and inconſiſtent perſon, not to be regarded; and though rational beings muſt ever allow, that a wiſe man may alter his purpoſe for good reaſons, yet the apoſtle's doing ſo, and not coming to them as he had propoſed, is catch'd

hold

hold of to ſupport theſe ſlanders. Their evil in ſo doing is plainly expoſed in the firſt chapter of this epiſtle; where we may alſo note, that the abſurdity and wickedneſs that many practiſe to this day, of connecting the goſpel itſelf with the character of it's preachers, is as old as the apoſtles time; for, becauſe Paul had acquainted them with his deſign of viſiting them, but had not done it, deceitful men not only inſinuated that he was a falſe man, but that his preaching was ſo too; *yea and nay*, inconſiſtency and nonſenſe not to be regarded, as if the weakneſs or iniquity of men were any argument againſt the truth of God! This conduct is a glaring proof of what all men are naturally inclined to deny, namely, that they are rebels againſt heaven; for it is a maxim with ſubjects, 'That their King 'can do no wrong;' thereby imputing the evils that are done, to his miniſters and ſervants: Whereas in the caſe before us, the KING of heaven is blaſphemed, his goſpel and his ſervice ſlighted, under the covert of the hypocriſy of others. And all thoſe who can make the weakneſs or evils of teachers or profeſſors an excuſe for their own neglect of religion, are in ſome meaſure guilty of this madneſs; for let men be ever ſo imperfect or falſe, Chriſt and his goſpel is eternal truth; therefore all thoſe that do not receive the ſame, implicitly ſay, "We will "not have this man to reign over us."

As therecurring to the evils of others to excuſe our own neglect, is a falſe way, ſo it often happens with thoſe who go therein, that what they alledge againſt others is not true; which was the caſe here: And after a juſt vindication of the apoſtle and his companion,

companion, he begins this chapter with asking the Corinthians, if there was any need of epistles of commendation to or from that church in their behalf, since the saving effects of their ministry remained in indelible characters, written in their hearts by the Spirit of the living God? Where teachers are not known, they need epistles of commendation to introduce them; which is an apostolic custom, and which many in our day have not sufficiently regarded, Acts 18. 27. But when persons have experienced the saving power of their preaching, that gives a greater confirmation of their divine mission, than human letters can do. However, though the apostle improves this evidence to silence gainsayers, he would not have any think that they had any sufficiency in themselves for this work; no, not so much as to *think any thing as of themselves*: Not to regulate their thoughts, or form any just conclusions. But says he, *All our sufficiency is of God, who also hath made us able ministers of the New testament, not of the letter but of the spirit; for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.* In which words you naturally observe, who it is that makes gospel ministers, the subject of their ministry, and the effect of it: Each of which I shall endeavour briefly to explain and improve on this occasion, as assistance may be granted.

I. You observe, it is God that makes able ministers. This perhaps none will deny; but the grand question is, How he does it? I answer, First, he does it by making them *new creatures.* This is so essential to the very nature of their work, and

so

ſo plainly revealed in the ſcripture, that if it were not for the prejudices of education and carnal intereſt, it would be needleſs to ſtand to prove it. For,

1. A principal part of their work is to labour to *reconcile* ſinners to God; and to imagine any one to be fit for that work, who is not truly reconciled himſelf, is one of the firſt-born of abſurdities. All know that the more gifted or crafty an enemy is, the more he is to be avoided and guarded againſt, inſtead of being entruſted with our moſt weighty affairs: And what is it ſhort of blaſphemy, to pretend that the moſt High will do ſo! Our apoſtle ſays, "All things are of God, "who hath *reconciled us* unto himſelf by Jeſus "Chriſt, and hath *given to us the miniſtry of re-* "*conciliation*, chap. 5. 18. This is God's order; he firſt reconciles the perſon, makes him a *new creature*, as in the preceding verſe, and then gives him the miniſtry of reconciliation.

2. The nature of their work is *ſpiritual*, and how can *carnal* men perform it? Our Lord aſſured a maſter in Iſrael that, "Except a man be *born* "*again*, he *cannot ſee* the kingdom of God:" And if he cannot *ſee* it, how can he act in it as he ought? The natural man *receiveth* not, neither can he *know* the things of the Spirit of God, and for this reaſon, becauſe they are *ſpiritually diſcerned*, 1 Cor. 2. 14. Reaſon will teach us that, "Simple ideas are only to be got by thoſe im- "preſſions objects themſelves make on our minds, "by the proper inlets appointed to each ſort; and

"if

"if they are not received this way, all the words "in the world, made use of to define, or explain "any of their names, will never be able to produce "in us the idea it stands for." As for instance, the true idea of light and colours cannot be had but by perceiving them with our sight; without which an ingenious blind man could get no nearer the idea of *scarlet*, than that "It was like the sound "of a trumpet." * And revelation informs us, that the way by which the spirit of truth guides his people into all truth, is by receiving of the things of Christ, and *shewing* the same *unto them*, John 16. 13, 14. The *vail* remains on mens hearts until the spirit takes it away, and gives them with *open face* to behold the divine glory, whereby they are *changed into the same image*, context ver. 14—18.

Ministers are to comfort others by the comfort wherewith *they themselves are comforted of God*, 2 Cor. 1. 4. They are to lead others in a way they are acquainted with, and ought to be able to say, *We speak that we know, and testify that we have seen.* Experimental knowledge is so necessary that even our great high Priest himself, though he were a son, yet learned he obedience by the things that he suffered; and being tempted, he was able to succour them that are tempted. I would illustrate this point by a familiar instance: We are not far from *Cape-Cod*, which is well known to be a dangerous coast for seamen, so that it is an established custom for all that go round it to take a pilot. Now suppose a man of good sense, who had seen exact charts of every point, rock or quick-sand upon the coast, and had all the intelligence that books

* Locke's essay on understanding. 6. 3. chap. 7. S. 11.

or men could give him about them, yet had never ſeen them himſelf; who will venture round the Cape with ſuch a pilot? Don't each one rather give in to the old maxim, that, *nothing teaches like experience?* Yet in the caſe before us many are ſo far from allowing it, that we have maſters in our Iſrael, who would take it as an affront to be aſked, whether they had experienced the new-birth or not?

3. No man can act from any higher principle than *ſelf*, until he is born from above; yet as ſurely as Chriſt ſpeaks true, no man *can* be his diſciple, (how much leſs his miniſter?) except he *deny himſelf*, and take up his croſs and follow Chriſt. Men may, and often do, deny one luſt to gratify another; may croſs luxury to gratify covetouſneſs, or croſs covetouſneſs to indulge luxury or ambition: Yea, may in ſome ſenſe croſs all theſe to eſtabliſh ſelf-righteouſneſs; yet ſtill they get no higher than ſelf; they do not deny ſelf, therefore ſuch cannot be fit to be Chriſt's miniſters; for his miniſters preach *not themſelves*, but Chriſt Jeſus the Lord, and themſelves the church's ſervants for Jeſus ſake. And the way they are brought to this is, *God who commanded the light to ſhine out of darkneſs, hath ſhined in their hearts*, to give the light of the knowledge of his glory. This, and this only can and doth give them to act from more noble principles, than ſelf-ſeeking and ſelf-righteouſneſs: It enables them to preach by *faith*, and in their conduct to look to things *unſeen, which are eternal*, 2Cor.4.5,6.13.18. Hence,

4. All allow the miniſters work to be very great and difficult, in which they have ſpecial need of divine help;

help; and to those whom Christ sends, he says, *Lo, I am with you*; and they are to be strong in the grace that is in him: But how can that be without union with him, even as the branch has with the vine? Without which he assures us that we *can do nothing*; and the words before our text tell us that *all our sufficiency is of God.* How far he may gird those who know him not for particular purposes, I leave; but how can any soul plead for promised assistance without faith, for *how shall they call on him in whom they have not believed?* Rom. 10. 14.

Therefore since men must be reconciled themselves, before they can heartily seek for others reconciliation to God; since it is necessary to be spiritually taught in order to teach others spiritual things, and to be supernaturally enlightned in order to act above self, and to have acquaintance with, and a trust in Christ, in order to plead his promised assistance; how clear is the evidence that he makes men new creatures in order to make them his ministers? If any should alledge *Judas* against this, I would only ask, whether they think his example was for imitation, or for warning? If they think for imitation, then how many *traitors* must we have? If for warning, then let us take it, and beware of such men. And by the way I would have them remember that *Judas*'s commission was limited to the *national* church; the pure gospel commission was given to the *eleven*, after Judas was gone to his own place, Mat. 10. 5, 6. and 28. 16, 20. If to evade all this any will say, we cannot know who are born again and who not. I reply, that our Lord has told us, *that* we shall know them,

and *how* we ſhall know them, Mat. 7. 15, 16.—Luk. 6. 44, 45. And if men do not believe him, ſtill he abides faithful, he cannot deny himſelf.

I therefore proceed to obſerve, that he makes miniſters by giving *ſpecial gifts* for that work. I am as far as any man from ſuppoſing that renewing grace, is the only qualification neceſſary for a goſpel miniſter. When our Lord aſcended on high he *gave gifts* unto men, among which were gifts for *Paſtors* and *Teachers*, Eph. 4. 8, 11. Special gifts both to underſtand, and to communicate divine things to the inſtruction and edification of others; and the command is, *As every man hath received the gift, even ſo miniſter*, &c. Let the gift be received by more public or more private means, there is no limitation as to that, but every man that God has given the gift to, he commands them to improve the ſame as *good ſtewards* of his manifold grace; and by his Spirit he teaches them their duty in this reſpect, as I have more largely ſhewn elſewhere. *

Once more, God makes able miniſters, by teaching and inclining his people to call and ſet apart to public office thoſe whom he has prepared therefor. As he has commanded each one to improve the gifts that are given to him, ſo he has granted to his people an unalienable right to judge of ſuch matters, for miniſters are not lords over their faith, but helpers of their joy; and Paul himſelf ſays, to the church of Corinth, *I ſpeak as to wiſe men, judge ye what I ſay.* And another church is commended by their glorious Head, becauſe they had tried them that

* Diſcourſe on an internal call to preach the goſpel.

that said they were apostles and were not, and had found them liars, Rev. 2. 2.

There hath been much contention both formerly and lately about the succession of ministers, and of ministerial authority; but I think Dr. *Owen*, in the last century, has stated this matter to good purpose: Says he, "The office of the ministry for the continuation of the church-state, and administration of "all ordinances of worship unto the end of the world, "is sufficiently secured, (1.) By the law, constitution and appointment, of our Lord Jesus Christ, "erecting that office, and giving warrants for it's "continuance to the consummation of all things, "Mat. 28. 20. Eph. 4. 13. (2.) By his continuance according unto his promise to communicate "*spiritual gifts* unto men, for the ministerial edification of the church. That this he doth so "continue to do, that it is the principal external "evidence of his abiding in the discharge of his "mediatory office. (3.) On the duty of believers, "or of the church, which is to choose, call, and "solemnly set apart unto the office of the ministry, "such as the Lord Christ, by *his Spirit*, hath made "meet for it, according unto the rule of his word. "And those who plead for the continuation of a "*successive* ministry, without respect unto these "things, without resolving both the authority and "office of it unto them, do but erect a *dead image*, "or embrace a dead carcase, instead of the living "and life-giving institutions of Christ. They take "away the living creature, and set up a *skin stuffed* "*with straw.*" * We come,

II. To

* Dr. Owen, on the original of evangelical churches, P. 164, 165.

II. To conſider the ſubject of their miniſtry, which in our text is deſcribed both negatively and poſitively. They are miniſters not of the *letter* but of the *ſpirit*; and to explain the letter, the law *written and engraven in ſtones* is named, the tenor of which is, *If a man do them, he ſhall live in them*; but *curſed is every one that doth them not*, Levi. 18. 5. Gal. 3. 10, 12. which is therefore here called, the *miniſtration of death*, becauſe no man upon earth doeth thoſe precepts, the penalty then is the certain conſequence. This is the letter; but from the apoſtles mentioning that which is *done away*, and that which is *aboliſhed*, it appears that the ceremonial law is alſo included, which, though a ſhadow of good things to come; yet the letter of it enjoined a multitude of offerings and works to be done by that people, enforced with terrible penalties on thoſe who did them not. Indeed the whole miniſtry of *Moſes* is intended, which was very *glorious*, and ſhined with great luſtre in the manner of giving the law, and in the many tokens that were given of his being taught and owned of God in his miniſtrations; yet when *Moſes was read* by the Jews, the *vail* was ſo upon their hearts, that they could not *ſtedfaſtly look to the end of that which is aboliſhed.* They ſtuck in what the letter required of them, without beholding the perfect fulfillment both of the moral and ceremonial law in the great Meſſiah: Which leads us to conſider the *ſpirit which giveth life*; which is here alſo called the *new-teſtament.* This cannot mean meerly that part of the bible that is ſo called in diſtinction from the reſt; for the apoſtles made abundant uſe of the old-teſtament in their miniſtry, and drew evangelical inſtructions from all

parts

parts of it; and they expreſly declare to us that thoſe ſcriptures were all given by divine inſpiration, for our learning and admonition, on whom the ends of the world are come, 1 Cor. 10. 11. Rom. 15. 4. 2 Tim. 3. 16, 17. It is well known that the word teſtament means the ſame as a *will*, whereby a perſon orders his affairs, and diſpoſes of his intereſt as he thinks beſt; ſo here it plainly means what is called the new covenant, in diſtinction from the old. When the great Creator had formed the world and all that is therein, he was pleaſed to crown man with glory and honor, and ſet him over the works of his hands, and to make known to him his will, and the tenor on which he ſhould enjoy his eſtate and happineſs, even perfect obedience to his law and that tranſgreſſion ſhould ſtrip him of life, and all. Man ſinned and ruined himſelf and his poſterity: Therefore ſince the firſt Adam is thus fallen, all things are put into the hands of the ſecond Adam, who is the Lord from heaven; and who will ſubdue all things unto himſelf, yea will ſwallow up death in victory. Pſa. 8. 5, 6. 1 Cor. 15, 45—54. Heb. 2. 7—9.

Some notice of this great deliverer was given to our firſt parents ſoon after the fall, under the name of the ſeed of the woman who ſhould bruiſe the ſerpent's head. And he was further promiſed to Abraham, that in his ſeed all the families of the earth ſhould be bleſſed. This new-teſtament way of ſalvation is clearly opened in the goſpel, which diſcovers how Chriſt was made of a woman, of Abraham's ſeed, and by his obedience and ſufferings in our ſtead, has procured a perfect righteouſneſs

which

which is unto all and upon all them that believe; which therefore is here called, the *miniſtration of righteouſneſs*, ver. 9. In conſequence of which the holy Spirit is given to take away the vail from men's hearts, and give them with open face as in a glaſs to behold the glory of the Lord, whereby they are changed into his image. From all which it appears that, by the New-teſtament, and the ſpirit that giveth life, is intended the way of juſtification by Chriſt's righteouſneſs, and of regeneration and ſanctification by the power of the holy Ghoſt; which may well be ſaid to give life, as the one delivers from the law-ſentence of death, and the other from the power of corruption which is ſpiritual death, and enables the ſoul to live unto God. This leads us,

III. To conſider the effect of the goſpel miniſtry. The letter killeth, but the ſpirit giveth life. The letter kills when it comes with light and power upon the mind, by laying open the corruption and contrariety of the heart to God, and fixing the juſt ſentence of death in the conſcience whereby all the hopes they have built on the life of their own hands, give up the ghoſt. Thus our apoſtle ſays, "Sin revived and I *died*; but when the letter had killed him, the Spirit of God revealed his Son in him, and drew his ſoul to a marriage union to *Him who is raiſed from the dead*, that he might ſerve in *newneſs of ſpirit*, and not in the *oldneſs of the letter*, Rom. 7. 4,—10. But where the letter only is preached, it killeth, as it takes life and courage from men, becauſe the law requires what it gives no ſtrength to perform, and the ſoul ſinks in dejection and deſpair, or tries to quit the thoughts of theſe

things

things for fear thereof; or else, supposing such teaching to be right, people go on in a round of duties with a name to live while they are dead, and the blind lead the blind, until both fall into eternal death.

From hence, my Brethren, we may learn, 1. The vast importance of the gospel ministry. Nothing less than the affairs of life and death are concerned therein; not such a transitory one as we have here; no, it is nothing less than the eternal life, or eternal death of precious souls. If ministers are enabled to be faithful, they may be instrumental of the life of many; of saving themselves, and those that hear them, 1 Tim. 4. 16. But if otherwise, they know not how much mischief they may do; how many blind souls they may lead to destruction, nor how many righteous ones they may make sad. O my fathers and brethren in the ministry, how should these things rouse us all up! How should they move us all to search our hearts and ways, and cause each one to exert himself in his station, not counting his life dear unto himself, so that he might finish his course with joy, and the ministry he has received to testify the gospel of the grace of God! And did christians view these things as they ought, how careful would it make them concerning those whom they received into the ministry? And also to pray for their ministers more, and to trust them less than many do. Who is sufficient for these things? Surely none are of themselves; and yet if persons have received benefit by any instrument, how prone are they to expect the like again without looking to the great fountain of all good? Did

chriſtians more clearly view theſe things as they are, they would be engaged to commit their miniſters and themſelves too more earneſtly unto Him who is all in all to his people. The great apoſtle of the Gentiles, notwithſtanding all his gifts and attainments, ſeemed as if he could not write one epiſtle without ſtirring up the ſaints to this duty, ſaying, "Brethren, pray for us; pray for us that the "word of the Lord may have free courſe and be "glorified; ſtriving together with me in your "prayers," &c. And ſurely there is great encouragement ſo to do, for when God appears in his glory to build up Zion, he will regard the prayer of the deſtitute, and not deſpiſe their prayer, Pſa. 102. 17.

2. Hence ſee the great importance of ever keeping law and goſpel in their diſtinct place, ſince one kills, and the other gives life. The law is good if we uſe it lawfully. It's proper uſe is to ſhew us what we ought to be, and in that light to convince us that we are not ſuch, for by the law is the *knowledge of ſin*; but if it is made uſe of to teach ſouls how to obtain the divine favor, or how to obtain eternal life, it is then put out of it's proper place. Though we hear many cry out, 'what! muſt we 'teach ſinners no duty till they are converted?' yes, by all means; teach them their indiſpenſable obligation to keep the whole law, and that they are bound over to anſwer for every neglect of it, at the great tribunal.—This many conceit is too ſtrict, and often plead for an abatement of the law, like the unjuſt ſteward, who for a hundred would write fifty or four ſcore. But what is this abatement? Is it

like

like Ezekiel's hearers, to come before God *as his people*, and with their *mouth* to shew *much love*, while their *heart* goeth after their coveteousness? The sum of the law is to love God with all our hearts, and our neighbours as ourselves; and Jesus said, *This do and thou shalt live.* But the lawyer, willing to justify himself, left God out of the question and said, *Who is my neighbour?* This is a notable abatement indeed! In trying rebels, for the judge to leave the King out of the question, and only try how they had behaved to each other! Yet how poorly does he make out even in this way? For by the instance of a man that fell among thieves, our Lord shews that a *Samaritan* (with whom they would have no dealings) discovered such *love* to a proper object of *compassion*, as both their Priest and Levite did not, Luk. 10. 29—37. So have I known some who would quote that summary of the divine requirement in Mica. 6. 8. and evidently rise no higher in their notion of doing *justly*, than just dealing towards men; as if robbing God of his just due, which is all the heart, all the soul, strength and mind, did not demand satisfaction! Yea, and how often is it now found, that many who profess to walk humbly with God in the forms of religion, yet pay little regard to answering their *just* engagements to men, or to shew *mercy* to those who stand in need?

If we come to a review of this text, we may see that the Lord had commenced an action against Israel for their ingratitude and disobedience, and called the mountains and hills to be judges of their stupid conduct. They soon saw they could not stand

the trial, and enquired how they ſhould make up the matter; whether he would not be *pleaſed* if they brought large offerings, or a multitude of them? And if irrational victims would not do, whether human ones would not pleaſe him? And they talk of offering the fruit of their body for the ſin of their ſoul. The anſwer is, he hath *ſhewed* thee O man what is good, and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do *juſtly*? &c. He had *ſhewed* them in the foregoing chapter, that out of Bethlehem HE ſhould come forth that is to be ruler in Iſrael, whoſe *goings forth* have been *from everlaſting*; and that, *this man ſhall be the peace.* God requires no more than his juſt due, and this God-man, and he only can pay it. He only has opened a way for righteouſneſs and peace to kiſs each other in the ſinner's ſalvation.

Some imagine that by letter, the literal meaning of ſcripture is intended; and by ſpirit ſome myſtical meaning that is hid under it; and from hence they call the word, a dead letter; but how greatly do ſuch miſtake the text? The letter *killeth*, and certainly that which actively kills others can't be a dead thing itſelf. The goſpel is as plainly written as the law, and our Lord's conſtant method of repelling ſatan was by what is *written*; and when the tempter tried to enſnare him in the ſame way, he did not depart from it to myſtical meanings, but produced another text which detected his perverſion of that. A great variety of improvements may be made of all parts of ſcripture, while one conſiſtent meaning runs through the whole; and thoſe who venture to depart from that, know not what deluſions they may run into. We

We always need the ſpirit to enlighten our minds to underſtand the ſcriptures, but the rule is the ſame in the dark as in the light, and is the ſame in itſelf before we underſtand its uſe, as when we are beſt ſkilled therein; though without the light we cannot ſee it, and without being taught we cannot uſe it aright; what the Spirit does, is to give us light, ſkill and ſtrength to uſe it as we ought. I know it is pleaded, that the ſcriptures know nothing of particular perſons and caſes now, and that this want muſt be ſupplied by the Spirit, which therefore they would have to be a rule ſuperior to the word. To which I reply, that the beſt laws of any ſtate know nothing of the names and particular circumſtances of thouſands that are under them; yet when thoſe laws are well underſtood, and duly applied, they ſerve well to ſettle the various caſes that occur; or if in ſome caſes they fail, it is becauſe human laws are imperfect; but the divine laws are not ſo; they are *perfect*, and therefore are ſufficient *thoroughly to furniſh the man of God unto all good works.* 2 *Tim.* 3. 16, 17. And the meek he will guide in judgment, and the meek he will teach his way; but to pretend that we have a rule within us that leads us in any reſpect contrary to God's written word, diſcovers a temper as contrary to true meekneſs, as it would do for a judge to aſſume a power to diſpenſe with the king's laws, or to make new ones as the turn ſuited.

Thoſe holy men that God employed to publiſh the New-teſtament as well as the old, he gave demonſtration to the world of their divine authority ſo to do, and *confirmed the word with ſigns following,*

ing, Mar. 16. 20. How great then muſt be their deluſion, if any imagine that the divine Spirit in them will teach them to judge or act contrary to what he formerly moved holy men to write! Yet are there not ſome even in this concourſe of people (for I mean to ſpeak plainly) that profeſs to be ſo ſpiritual as not externally to regard ſome of the plain commands of Chriſt, who at the ſame time depend not on a righteouſneſs wrought without them, but on what is wrought within them? But if we depend upon any inward frames or exerciſes as the matter of our juſtification and acceptance with God, we as really build upon the letter as any formaliſt in the world; all the difference lies in the mode of doing; for the letter is *do and live*, and the doing it requires is *love* to God and man, and a behavior agreable thereto, and who does not know that *love* has it's ſeat within? So that inward doings are as plainly the letter as any thing that is outward, and to depend upon either of them is directly contrary to *believing on Him that juſtifieth the ungodly*.

The law requires a right temper and behavior, and ſays, *I will if they will*, but gives no ſuch thing; the goſpel reveals Chriſt's righteouſneſs, and gives the Spirit to write the law in our hearts with this tenor, *I will and they ſhall*, Gal. 3. 10—14. Heb. 8. 10. In the oldneſs of the letter the promiſe is always predicated upon ſomething good in the creature; but the newneſs of the Spirit reſts the promiſe intirely upon the merits of the Savior, and the truth of the promiſer; and hence ariſes that important diſtinction, which the apoſtle inſiſts ſo much upon, between *debt* and *grace*, *wages* and *gift*,

gift, Rom. 4. 4, 5, 19. and 6. 23. Heb. 11. 11. And here I would observe, that many greatly mistake themselves about holding to salvation by grace. Because the blessings they hope to receive are of infinitely greater value than their doings, therefore they suppose they hold to grace and not debt. But could Adam if he had stood, or can any angel in heaven now, suppose that there is any thing like an equal value between their best obedience and most devout service, and eternal life? Surely no. Well then, according to this notion, all the favors bestowed by the Creator on men or angels, is all not debt but grace, and the apostles long talk of a distinction between them was all either impertinence or imposition! But if men would duly consider, they may know, that by the laws of men, where there is a fair promise made of a particular sum upon a certain condition, if the condition is fulfilled, the law will oblige the promiser to pay the sum, let it be ever so much greater than the value of the condition that is performed. Debt is to *pay* what is engaged; and do not all know that a *gift* to the needy and miserable is quite another thing? And if any should come to beg for help, and yet should so forget themselves as to dictate to others how much to give, and also claim it as their right, instead of humbly asking for it as a free favour; would not men soon discern the difference? How much more will not the searcher of hearts do it?

Perhaps men blind themselves in our day concerning this matter, as much under the word faith, as in any way whatever. When the word is used about

about human affairs, it is as eaſily underſtood as other words, but in religion ſcarce any are more controverted; and what can be the cauſe of it but it's being turned from it's proper meaning?

Aſſent to a report that comes with proper evidence of its truth, is the plain nature of faith, the influence the report has upon us is the effect or exerciſe of faith; but it is ſuppoſed by multitudes, that devils and hypocrites aſſent to the ſame truths the ſaint does, and therefore that ſomething more belongs to the nature of the ſaint's faith than aſſent to truth; but I humbly conceive that this is a great miſtake. The devils, and ſometimes wicked men, believe that there is one God that will puniſh ſinners, ſo as to make them tremble; yet there are two parts of truth on which our ſalvation turns that they never have aſſented to: One is, that the condemning ſentence againſt them is juſt; the other is, that God can find in his heart to ſave thoſe who have nothing of their own but ſin. The evidence of theſe truths ſhine as clear in the ſcriptures, as the ſun does in the firmament; but we have our Lord's own teſtimony that, *Every one that doth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, leſt his deeds ſhould be reproved:* And *this is their condemnation*, John 3. 19, 20. Yet we have many maſters ſince Nicodemus's day who will dare to deny what our Lord here aſſerts. They allow it to be ſo with many, but not with *every one*; the natural conſequence of which is, for them to ſuppoſe it unjuſt, for thoſe who have ſome good ideas and diſpoſitions, not to have a better claim to ſalvation than others; and from hence proceed the exclamations

tions we often hear, against the doctrine of sovereign grace, as making God unjust, a respecter of persons, &c. Whereas if it were truly believed that we are every one condemned by a righteous sentence, there could be no room to complain of injustice if all were executed, nor to doubt of its being intirely of grace if any were pardoned. And how absurd is it to imagine that God will pardon any one soul till it comes to own his justice? For without that they can never be truly reconciled to his government, nor he honored in their salvation. And if so, then how absurd are all those notions (of which our world is full) that sinners in general believe the gospel to be true, but that they have a great deal to do in order to get its blessings applied to them! For all doings *before* reconciliation are a putting off for the present, and if they believed they were justly condemned, how could they bear with delay lest the door should be shut against them forever. And if they believed that God speaks the truth when he proclaims pardon to the *chief of sinners, what duties could they do before they received his testimony, and set to their seal that he is true?*

If a man that is under sentence of death should slip from his confinement, and do ever so much in hopes of being again received as a good subject, don't all men know that his doings can never be true *obedience* to the authority that condemned him, till that authority either reverses the sentence, or grants him a pardon? And now let us see what sort of faith those people have, who are not ready to come to Christ now, yet say they are *striving* for

it, and hope to obtain it hereafter. Why indeed they believe there is a dangerous ſentence out againſt them, and they fear they ſhould ſtand a poor chance to come as they are, but they hope by and by to get ready for a re-hearing, and hope then to make it appear that the Judge was miſtaken in his ſentence, and that though they had been drawn into ſome very diſagreable things, yet that they are now ſo well diſpoſed, that they *ought* to be received to *mercy!* Theſe are notable notions of faith, of juſtice, and of grace! O ſinner, be not deceived! All ſuch attempts will ſucceed no better than the wife of Jereboam did, in *feigning* herſelf to be *another* perſon, 1 Kings 14. 5—14.

Thus I think it plainly appears that no unrenewed ſoul truly believes that God is either juſt or gracious, nor ever will by all the power of moral ſuaſion; nothing can produce this faith but that *creating* power that in the beginning ſaid, "Let there be *light*, and there was *light*:" Firſt, the light of the law which *kills* all the ſinner's vain hopes; and then the light of the goſpel, which opens the true door of hope through Him who has fulfilled the law. Our natural attachment to our doings, the apoſtle compares to a woman's being wedded to an huſband, whoſe authority is *binding* upon her as long as they both live; and he obſerves that it would be *adultery* for her to marry another before her firſt huſband was dead; from whence he ſhews that we cannot be married to Chriſt until the law is dead to us, and we to that; and in explaining his meaning he is very careful to ſecure the honor of the law, that it is *holy*, *juſt* and *good*; but when a

ſurety

surety has fully answered for a debt or crime, that action is *dead* to the debtor or criminal, so that a just law cannot hurt him for it, any more than the dead can hurt the living; hence this death or dissolution of the marriage tie between us and the law, is by the *body of Christ.* His bearing our *sins in his own body on the tree,* took away the power of the law to condemn us, and a view of our sins, and of him who atoned for them, turns the heart from sin and from seeking life by our doings, to trust in and unite our hearts with *Him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God:* Our life is still to be directed by the same law of love to God and man, only it is changed into other hands, we are *under law to Christ* our new husband. And it is well known that when a woman is married the law must come upon her husband for all her debts, and that she is to look to him for all she wants, and to be under his government: So here we are to serve him in *newness of spirit,* and not in the *oldness of the letter.*

The oldness of the letter promises life upon doing, but gives no strength to do; the newness of the spirit says, as thy days is thy strength shall be; come boldly to the throne of grace for help in time of need. The oldness of the letter gives no encouragement to come only upon our doing, and sets a flaming sword in the way of the guilty; but the newness of the spirit directs us to take all our encouragement to come, from the merits, compassion, intercession and promise of our husband, who has engaged *justice* and *faithfulness* to *forgive* the guilty,

ty, and to *cleanſe* the filthy. Heb. 4. 14—16. 1 John 1. 9. The oldneſs of the letter ſuſpends our hope *doubtfully* upon our obedience; the newneſs of the ſpirit fixes it as an anchor *ſure and ſtedfaſt* upon what is within the vail. Heb.6.19. Upon the whole, that teaching which enjoins duty upon us as the condition of our obtaining favor of God, be that duty called repentance, faith, or whatever it may, is legality; that which would abate the law to bring it down to our ability is injuſtice; that which tends to releaſe us from our obligation, till almighty grace appears for our deliverance, is licentiouſneſs; but that teaching which opens the holy nature and authority of God's law over us, ſhewing how we are all condemned thereby, and then the help there is freely proclaimed to every one in Jeſus Chriſt, and the fullneſs there is in him to enable the believer to perfect holineſs in the fear of God, is evangelical; therefore let each ſoul take heed what he hears.

The copiouſneſs of this ſubject has carried me ſo far, that I muſt haſten to a cloſe with a ſhort Addreſs.

Firſt, To you, my Brother, who art this day to take the ſolemn Charge of this flock. The ſatisfaction we have gained of your being qualified in a good meaſure, and called of God into this work, gives ſenſible pleaſure, and I can heartily bid you welcome into theſe labours of Chriſt's vineyard, and hope we may be mutual helpers to each other. I doubt not but the charge of ſouls has ſometimes appeared to you an inſupportable weight; it is indeed

deed too heavy for men or angels to go through of themselves; but ever remember, that the government of Zion is upon Christ's shoulders, and you are to be strong in the grace that is in him. I have endeavoured, as I have been enabled, plainly to lay before you the true nature of preaching the gospel, and may you be enabled to be faithful therein unto the death, and receive a crown of life through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Secondly, To this dear Church of Christ. Brethren, we rejoice with you this day, to see things so comfortably settled among you after your sore trials, and that you are like to enjoy the stated ministrations of the divine word and ordinances again. These are favors greatly to be prized and thankfully to be improved; though I hope you will never forget the sensible experience you have had of the uncertainty of their continuance; and so that you ought always to live with an intire dependence on the great Head of the church, both for the continuance of these means, and also for a blessing on the use of them.

And permit me my Brethren to lay before both officers and members, three points of truth, which I earnestly request you to keep always in mind which are,

1. That a visible church-state with it's order and government, is not an invention of men, but the appointment of God. Therefore,

2. That those who rightly join therein, join themselves *to Him*, who is both able and faithful to carry them through all that he calls them to do or suffer in his cause. Hence,

3. There

3. There can never be any juſt excuſe for one ſoul to deſert this cauſe while HE remain what HE is.

Theſe are ſuch ſelf-evident truths that it might ſeem an affront to your underſtandings to ſtand long to prove them, yet through our darkneſs they are ſo often forgotten, and that forgetfulneſs is productive of ſo many miſchiefs, that I preſume you will not deem it unſeaſonable thus to ſtir up your pure minds by way of remembrance. A due regard to theſe points would prevent what has often happened, of perſons joining with a church in its proſperity, and deſerting it in adverſity, being fond of comfort, but backward to do their duty. And a juſt view of theſe truths would prevent perſons joining to the church when they do not to the Lord. We read when Ananias and his wife were ſtruck dead for their deceit, that of the reſt durſt no man join himſelf *to them*; but believers were *the more added to the Lord*, Acts 5. 13, 14. Viewing things in this light would keep people from truſting their religion to their miniſter, without ſeeing with their own eyes, on the one hand; or on the other, riſing in reſentment againſt them becauſe they will not do for gods. Paul ſays, we have this treaſure in *earthen veſſels*, that the excellency of the power may be *of God*, and *not of us*; and who was ever ſo ſtupid as to think a veſſel could feed them without new ſupplies, or to quarrel with it becauſe they found it empty; would they not rather carry it to the ſtore that it might be filled again? Well, my Brethren, if you will do ſo with your miniſters, it will learn you the true difference, between having

a man's *person* in admiration because of advan[illegible], and esteeming him highly in love for his [illegible] *sake.* Again, if we are truly joined to the Lord, we have a friend at hand to open our griefs to, and to roll our burdens upon, which may keep us from the error of many, who being burdened with their brother, whisper it to this, that and the other, instead of acting according to divine rule with him. Prov. 25. 9. Matt. 18. 15—17. If we viewed Him who walks in the midst of his churches, with eyes like a flame of fire, how would it keep us from complaining of our brethren, without being faithful to them? Since he has given clear direction therein, how churches are to be faithful to their members, and members to churches, that have strayed, so as either to recover them, or to clear our selves of them, if they will not be reformed. In short, when these truths are duly remembered they will make ministers faithful to their people, and people faithful to their ministers, for their obligations are mutual; and the right performance of every duty toward each other, is serving the Lord Christ; and when ministers view how they owe their all to Him, how gladly will they spend and be spent in his cause? And the same view will make people as glad to discharge their duty towards their ministers, and towards each other. Therefore, let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering (for he is faithful that promised) and let us consider one another to provoke unto love, and to good works; not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another, and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching! AMEN.

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